

Domestic bases will feel impact of budget cuts

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Marines and their families should be prepared for possible cutbacks in services and maintenance at installations as the Corps attempts to balance the needs of the war fighter with quality of life on base during a difficult budgetary period.

Throughout the next year, Marine Corps Installations Command will evaluate ranges, housing, dining choices, green initiatives and youth/teen services across the force's installations as part of a continuing effort to improve Marines' readiness and maintain the services upon which their families depend, said Maj. Gen. James Kessler, commander of MCICOM.

"I think many of our Marines out there probably don't think a lot about their base," said Kessler. "But if they really wanted to know how MCICOM helps them every day, it's where they live, where they eat, where they work — and although it isn't always apparent, it affects them in a very

direct way," he said.

In addition to ensuring that installations are equipped with desirable family housing and facilities, including child-development centers, the Corps must provide installations with advanced training ranges and other facilities that are vitally important to sustain war-fighter readiness and capability for the nation's next fight, Kessler said.

"We're working to expand Twentynine Palms to increase the training opportunities for our forces so that we can train at the Marine expeditionary brigade level, which we cannot do today," said Kessler. "We're really happy with the progress that we've made to date."

Maintenance cutbacks

But in a tight fiscal environment, with the possibility of deeper budget cuts to come, Marines and their families could begin to notice changes at the installations they call home. For example, cutbacks in the service contracts for facility maintenance

could mean common areas get mowed every other week instead of once a week.

"It's going to be a challenge, and there may be some areas [where] we take some short-term risk. It might be in things like facility sustainment," said Kessler. Whether the service might be forced to reduce services in critical areas such as child care, fitness or community center hours remains to be seen.

Kessler warns that the Corps needs to be careful before making a decision to cut facility sustainment funds because long-term degradation of facilities would ultimately cost the service more money to repair and renovate down the road. Contracts for custodial services could also be reduced or even eliminated as a result of pending budget cuts, said Kessler.

Green initiatives, which are money-savers, continue to be of high importance to MCICOM. The Residential Energy Conservation Program, an incentive program the Corps introduced in April, has



THOMAS BROWN/STAFF

Maj. Gen. James A. Kessler, head of Marine Corps Installations Command, says budgetary pressures will force the Corps to make "some very hard decisions" regarding facility sustainment over the next few years.

yielded energy and financial savings, and the command plans to integrate it into public-private housing projects at more installations.

"The technology continues to improve, so the return on investment becomes more in our favor," said Kessler. Solar projects "help to enhance war-fighter readiness by reducing our reliance on the grid and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels."

MCICOM stood up in 2011 to

provide a command authority for the installations around the force. One year later, the command is set to declare full operational capability on Oct. 1.

"It's unfortunate, in a way, that the budget cuts are coming concurrent with the standup of MCICOM," said Kessler. "I think there may be some who will link those two things together. There will be some very hard decisions that are going to have to be made. That's just the facts." □